Transfers and translations in a c.1600 *Virgin and Child* from the Courtauld Gallery collection

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1.1 Introduction

The collaborative nature of the Courtauld Research Forum Associates project enabled investigation of art historical and material questions arising from a *Virgin and Child* in the Courtauld Gallery (Fig. 1). The painting has previously been attributed to the German painter Johann König. The project aimed to address the question of attribution and to increase understanding of the complex physical history of the painting. Research touched on diverse issues, including the dissemination and translation of compositional models between southern and northern Europe; workshop practice and replication at the turn of the seventeenth century; and a radical physical intervention carried out a by pre-twentieth century restorer – a rare example of the removal and transfer of a painting from its original canvas to a wooden support.

The *Virgin and Child* is copied from a painting attributed to König in the Louvre (Fig. 2), which itself derives from Leonardo da Vinci's *Madonna of the Carnation* in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich (Fig, 3, 1473-8). Discussion of Courtauld painting alongside its two precursors addresses the relationships between the three versions and provides a context for the creation and history of the painting studied for this project.

1.2 The *Madonna of the Carnation* and its copies: provenance, attribution and replication

Leonardo's *Madonna of the Carnation*, Alte Pinakothek, Munich
The *Madonna of the Carnation*, now in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, is dated to 1473-78 and one of the last paintings Leonardo made while still in Florence in the workshop of Verrocchio, and possibly one of his first individual commissions. There is a suggestion that Leonardo's *Madonna of the Carnation* was made for the Medici family, as the glass balls that make up the tassel of the pillow Jesus sits on can be interpreted as a Medici symbol.

Nothing is known of the *Madonna*'s location between the 1470s and its rediscovery in Germany in 1889, when it was bought by a Dr Albert Haug from an apothecary in Günzberg for 22 marks. It was soon sold to the Alte Pinakothek for 800 marks (having been valued at 8,000), and was attributed to Verrocchio's workshop. The reattribution of the painting to Leonardo was accepted in the early 20th century.

The Louvre painting (attributed to Johann König, c.1600)
The version now in the Louvre is first recorded in the collection of Louis XVIII.[1] While the majority of the composition is replicated exactly from the Leonardo painting, there are significant changes: the landscape seen through the windows, and the bouquet of flowers in the foreground, have been completely altered. All other elements remain iconographically identical.

The attribution to Johann König was proposed by Kurt Bauch and Jacques Foucart in 1967; the painting had previously been attributed successively to: 16th Century Flemish School, Follower of Bernard van Orly, and Adam Elsheimer.[2] Bauch's attribution of the Louvre painting to König

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[1] Emil Möller, 'Leonardo's Bildnis der Ginevra dei Benci,' in *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* Vol. 1937/8, No. 12, 1938

[2] Kurt Bauch, 'Die Elsheimer Ausstellung in Franckfurt am Main,' in *Kunstchronik*, March 1967. Foucart's work on the attribution of the Louvre *Virgin and Child* to König is unpublished and is held in the Louvre's

is based on his identification of a landscape on copper in the Kunstmuseum Basel, which is identical to the composition in the two left-hand arched windows of the Louvre and Courtauld paintings. In an article about the circle of Adam Elsheimer,[3] Bauch identifies the landscape as a work by König (believed to be an associate of Elsheimer), seemingly on stylistic grounds (Fig. 4). He attributes the Louvre *Virgin and Child* to König on the basis of its similarity to the Basel copper panel. The Basel painting had previously been ascribed by Roberto Longhi to Adam Elsheimer.[4]

It has been suggested that the technique of hatched highlights found in the landscape on copper links the work to a graphic artist rather than to König, and accordingly the catalogue of Kunstmuseum Basel tentatively attributes the painting to the Swiss topographical printmaker Matthäus Merian the Elder (1593-1650).[5] Merian the Elder, father of the botanic artist Maria Sybillia Merian, is believed to have worked in Zurich, Basel, Frankfurt and France, but is not known to have travelled to Italy. The landscapes seen through the arched windows in the Louvre and the Courtauld paintings differ from the Basel landscape in their lack of the hatching technique; the elision and elimination of certain details in the Louvre and Courtauld versions suggest that the more elaborate Basel painting was produced first.

The Courtauld painting
The *Virgin and Child* studied for this project follows the Louvre version in its depiction of the landscape and flowers; its traditional attribution to Johann König follows that of the Louvre version. It is part of the Gambier Parry Bequest, which entered the Courtauld Gallery collection in 1966. The paintings making up the bequest, including the *Virgin and Child*, were amassed in the nineteenth century by Thomas Gambier Parry (1816-1888). Its provenance prior to this has not been traced. However, it is clear that the painting – which is known to have been in the collection during Thomas Gambier Parry's lifetime – was purchased before the *Madonna of the Carnation* came to light (in 1889) and so the Gambier Parrys could not initially have known of this originating composition.

The painting is discussed by Gambier Parry's son Ernest in the inventory he compiled using his father's documents. A note written by Ernest in the 1910s or '20s, by which time the *Madonna of the Carnation* was well-known and had been identified as a work by Leonardo da Vinci, describes his correspondence with the Leonardo expert Dr Emil Möller:

> *'I sent Dr Möller a photograph of our picture, also a small piece of the panel on which it is painted and which is of poplar (like the original [Leonardo]) and of great age. Dr Möller considers our picture very valuable, and also that it was painted about the year 1600.'*[6]

It seems Ernest was not aware of the complex physical history of the object: the poplar support is not original to the painting. Dr Möller knew of the Louvre painting, and considered the Courtauld version to be produced after it rather than vice versa.[7]

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object file. It has not been possible to access this research. Investigation of this resource could help to throw further light on the attribution of the Louvre painting to König.

[3] German landscape painter who worked in Italy in the early 17th century; see Bauch, 'Die Elsheimer Ausstellung.'

[4] Foucart's work on the attribution of the Louvre *Virgin and Child* to König is unpublished and is held in the Louvre's object file. It has not been possible to access this material during the period of this study. Investigation of this resource could help to throw further light on the attribution of the Louvre painting to König.

[5] 'Matthäus Merian d. Ä(?), *Landschaft bei Sonnenaufgang* [Landscape at Sunrise],' Inv. 433. The painting is in oil on copper and measures 18 x 14.6cm. The painting was the gift of Prof. Kaiser of Zürich in 1862. http://sammlungonline.kunstmuseumbasel.ch.

[6] Ernest Gambier Parry, unpublished inventory of the Gambier Parry collection at Highnam Court, undated. Courtauld Institute of Art.

Later alterations to the dimensions of the three paintings
The *Madonna of the Carnation* and the two later copies discussed here have all undergone changes to their formats (Figs 5-6). The Leonardo painting has been trimmed on all four sides, with narrow fillets of wood (stained to a dark colour but not retouched to mimic the missing areas) applied along the left and right sides in 1937. It is believed that only thin slivers of the original edges are missing, but the alteration has removed the very edge of the Virgin's proper right hand. The effect of the trimming is to exaggerate what must always have been a very close-cropped, intimate composition.

The two copies have, in contrast, been widened, artificially creating a more expansive sense of space in their compositions. Additions of 4.5cm have been added to the left and right sides of the Louvre painting,[8] creating an almost square format. Smaller additions of 1.5cm have been made to the left and right of the Courtauld version by adhering the painting to a wider support, and the top and bottom edges have been trimmed by an unknown but probably minimal amount. During the recent treatment, the non-original additions to the Courtauld painting were retouched in a neutral tone and are now concealed by the painting's frame [Fig. 8].

2.1 Art historical context

Johann König
König was born in Nuremberg, Germany around 1586. After working in Augsburg, he travelled to Venice in 1607 and is known to have been in Rome in 1610, where he is likely to have met Adam Elsheimer (who died at the end of that year). Here he was one of a number of German and other Northern European artists, of whom Elsheimer was the most successful, who produced commercially profitable landscape paintings influenced by Italian painters. König later returned to Germany, and was in Augusburg in 1614 (where he painted scenes for the Ratshaus) before arriving in Nuremberg by 1630, where he died in 1642. He is most well-known for finely detailed landscapes, sometimes containing religious or mythological scenes, often executed at small scale on copper panel.

The landscapes of the Louvre and Courtauld paintings, which have been altered from Leonardo's model, are stylistically in keeping with those of König and the circle of artists working in Italy with which he is associated. The sense of recessive space achieved by building successive layers of landscape, with the most distant elements painted in cooler, bluish tones, is consistent with landscapes painted by northern European artists at this time. The finely painted lead-tin yellow highlights on the leaves of the trees is also characteristic of similar artists, and many of the motifs (the pair of birds flying, the bright sunburst, and the isolated farm building) are found in other works by this circle of artists (Fig. 9). However, there appears to be little evidence directly linking the composition found in the Louvre and Courtauld paintings with König, and the linear cross-hatching technique of the copper panel from which part of the landscape derives is at odds with the more rounded dabs found in more firmly attributed König paintings such as the Courtauld Gallery's *Latona* (Fig. 10.).

The *Madonna of the Carnation*
Many artists have copied or drawn ideas from the *Madonna of the Carnation* and related compositions, but the Leonardo version itself was steeped in the motifs from the workshop. In

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[7] Cornelia Syre, 'Die Kopien,' in C. Syre, J. Schmidt and H. Stege, *Die Madonna mit der Nelke* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2006), 113-115

Verrocchio's *Study of a Female Head* (Fig. 11), for example, one can see a very similar tilt of the head, downcast eyes, and hairstyle. Another sketch, attributed to Perugino while he was in Verrocchio's workshop (Fig. 12) shows a brooch almost identical to the one worn by the Virgin in Leonardo's *Madonna of the Carnation*. While these drawings appear to be loosely related to the *Madonna*, more direct methods of facsimile were possible; transferring compositions by pouncing drawn cartoons was a vital aspect of workshop production at this period. It seems certain that the painter(s) of the Louvre version had direct access to a cartoon or tracing of Leonardo's *Madonna*, if not to the painting itself: overlays of the three versions show that those elements of the composition which have been carried over have been copied precisely (Figs 13, 14). The Louvre and Courtauld versions are the closest known copies of the *Madonna of the Carnation*.[9]

The development of flower paintings in Europe
By the turn of the 17th century, still life paintings of flowers had become a well-established genre in and of themselves. Their origins lie in paintings which combined religious scenes with natural elements of symbolic significance, a subject which was popular in northern Europe in the 15th century; see, for example, Jan van Eyck's *Anunciation* (Fig. 15; oil on canvas, transferred from wood, 1434-1436; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC), in which the vase of lilies signifies Mary's purity. Leonardo's *Madonna of the Carnation* is part of this tradition. Hans Memling's *Vase of Flowers* (Fig. 16; 1480, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid) is key in the emergence of flower painting as a genre in and of itself, and the genre proliferated in 16th and 17th century Dutch and Flemish painting. While flowers continued to be used for symbolic and religious meaning, the genre became ostensibly a secular one.

The bouquet in the Louvre and Courtauld paintings is reminiscent of independent flower paintings produced in Germany in the late 16th century, such as those by Ludger tom Ring the Younger (Fig. 17). The alteration of the bouquet translates the loose, naturalistic aesthetic of the Leonardo painting to a more static one, in which a symmetrical composition is used to present different perspectives of the same flowers. Both side and frontal views of flowers presented, with each element isolated to prevent overlapping, which would obscure the full aspect of individual flowers. The bouquet includes stems of Crown Imperial, Heart's Ease, Lily of the Valley, Tulip, Narcissus, Pink, and Forget-Me-Not, all flowers commonly found in still lifes of this time. The inclusion of this contemporary still life into the much earlier composition represents an intriguing integration of overtly religious and seemingly secular imagery. The depiction of tulips is significant: wildly popular in the Netherlands at the turn of the 17th century (having been introduced to Europe in 1554), 'tulip mania' reached a peak in the 1620s-30s until a sudden crash in value in 1637. The continuation of the tulip motif in the Courtauld version perhaps indicates it was produced before this turn of events.

4. Material production

Support and preparation
The *Virgin and Child* was painted originally on a plain-weave canvas, which gives it a different texture and finish to the Louvre panel painting . The use of canvas as opposed to panel indicates that the Courtauld painting was cheaper to produce and therefore presumably sold for a lower price than the Louvre painting.

The painting has a buff-coloured ground layer of iron oxide earths and calcium sulphate. In the flesh areas there is a second, darker grey underlayer consisting of charcoal and lead white with calcium sulphate, as well as a little green earth (Fig. 18). The calcium sulphate ground is

[9] Emil Möller, 'Leonardo's Bildnis'

strongly indicative of southern European, presumably Italian, origin; the double-layered structure, and the fairly dark grey tone, is more closely associated with northern European techniques, suggesting that the painting may have been produced in Italy using Italian materials, but that the method of execution was more informed by trends north of the Alps – which is in keeping with the circle of artists around König and Elsheimer.

Pigments
The palette used is consistent with a late sixteenth or early seventeenth century date. In addition to earth pigments, lead white, and bone and charcoal blacks, the artist has used lead-tin yellow (predominantly in the background landscape and the Virgin's yellow mantle), vermilion and red lake (in the flesh, carnation and red part of the Virgin's robe), copper greens (mixed in with the landscape colours and the shadows in the flesh) and blue verditer (in the Virgin's robe and landscape). Blue verditer (synthetic azurite) is chemically identical to azurite, but its characteristic spherical particles can be seen under high magnification. Although more prevalent from the 17th century, its use is recorded in Italy as early as the 1530s.[10]

Composition
No evidence of transfer method has been seen in the infrared photograph, although brushed underdrawn outlines can be seen in some places. The exact replication of the composition, however, does suggest that a transfer method such as tracing must have been used.

Paint application
As might be expected with such a precise copy, the composition has been laid in carefully with each section treated individually, leaving reserves for each compositional element. Thin slivers of ground can be seen between the edges of each element where they do not quite meet (fig. 19), suggesting the copyist has seen each component as a discrete, contiguous compartment rather than as a continuous solid form. Thus, the carnation held by the Virgin is painted directly onto its own carnation-shaped section of ground, with the Virgin's robe carefully worked in around it.

For the most part the paint is thinly applied, with little in the way of undermodelling; creation of form and depth is achieved by blending different tones in a single layer. The technique of flesh painting is distinctive and goes some way to help suggesting a narrower date range for the painting. Here the grey ground is of vital importance in the way it is used to help create shadows and midtones, and contributes to the cool paleness of the skin tones. Modelling in the figures is achieved by varying the thickness of the light-coloured flesh paint (which consists of vermilion, red lake and lead white), allowing more or less of the grey ground to show through. The lightest tones are painted with a thick, opaque, paste-like paint, and dark shadows are created where the ground is left completely uncovered. More subtle shadows (Fig. 20) are created by drawing a thin film of the light flesh-paint over the ground, allowing the grey to show through. Some of the very darkest shadows are strengthened slightly with lines of darker, warmer paint.

The optical effect this has is to create a very pale, cool-toned, monumental quality – it has an almost marble-like, sculptural appearance caused by the turbid medium effect. To give more sense of liveliness to these cool tones, certain details have been picked out with reds, such as the figures' cheeks and lips; this is blended with the rest of the flesh paint in a single layer.

The flesh painting technique is significant, as it appears to situate the painting in a northern tradition which was beginning to go out of fashion by the early sixteenth century.[11] Northern

[10] Larry Keith, 'Giulio Romano and *The Birth of Jupiter*: Studio Practice and Reputation,' *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, Vol. 24, 2003, 44

[11] H. Miedema and B. Meijer, 'The introduction of coloured ground in painting and its influence on stylistic development, with particular respect to sixteenth-century Netherlandish art,' *Storia dell'Arte*, 35, 1979, 79-98

artists who travelled to Italy in the last decade of the 16th century were inspired by what they saw as the warm, glowing, lifelike appearance of the flesh painting there and adapted their own techniques to try and replicate what they saw, altering the very cool-toned technique seen in the Courtauld painting. This results in a move towards a use of warmer reddish underlayers, more ochre pigments in flesh tones and warm glazes in the shadows to create depth, as in *Danaë*, painted in 1603 by Hendrick Goltzius, (Fig. 21) one of the early proponents of the newer technique. A related softening of contours also contrasts with the sharp delineation of the figures seen in the Courtauld painting.

The shift in effect was discussed by Karel van Mander at the turn of the 17th century: 'Recently we have seen our art in the Netherlands changing and putting on a better appearance, especially with respect to colouring. Flesh tints and depths have departed more and more from a stony greyness, or pale, fishy, coldish colour: for the glow in body colour and fleshy depths have now come very much into use.'[12] It seems reasonable to suggest that the Courtauld painting, as an example of the earlier approach, could well have been made slightly earlier than would be suggested by the associated attribution to König (which would date it after 1610).

Later changes
The non-original wooden panel support is of poplar, and is damaged by woodworm. X-radiography (Fig. 22) shows that insect channels on the front of the panel were filled before the paint layers were adhered, as they contain x-ray dense material and thus show up white. The panel must have been cut down when already damaged for these channels to have been revealed, then filled to provide a flatter surface onto which the painting could be applied. Damage and wear to the painting edges which can be seen in x-ray, and impact cracks consistent with damage to a stretched canvas painting, indicate that the painting remained on its original support alone for quite some time before the adhesion to the wooden panel.

5. Physical history and context

<u>The physical history of the Courtauld painting</u>
While initial examination of the painting confirmed that the painting had originally been executed on canvas, and so the poplar support is non-original (see Material Production, above), it became apparent during conservation treatment that none of the original canvas survives (Fig. 23). The painting has been transferred from canvas to panel, meaning the canvas was separated from the paint layers. These were then adhered onto the new support with animal glue; a thick paper interlayer can be seen between the paint and panel, and may have been used as a transitional support before laying the image onto the wood (Fig. 24). The painting did not escape this intervention unscathed, and some small dislodged flakes of paint related to the transfer can be seen to the upper right of the Virgin's head.

The transfer of paint layers onto a new support is a historic and obsolete method that was carried out in parts of Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries.[13] The earliest transfers were carried out in Italy in the 1720s, and over the following century became more widespread. Research into this kind of intervention has focused on its practice in Paris and St Petersburg, where it appears to have been most prevalent. Transfers were carried out to preserve the image layers of paintings where the support was so badly degraded that the survival of the image was in danger. The decision to transfer the paint layers prioritised the painted image over the integrity of the structure as a whole, but was intended as a conservation measure for images

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[12] Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck*, Haarlem, 1603-4; Paul Taylor, 'The glow in late sixteenth and seventeenth century Dutch painting,' in Hermens, ed., *Looking through paintings*
[13] It can be assumed that the transfer of the Courtauld painting was carried out prior to its entering the Gambier Parry collection, as Ernest Gambier Parry was not aware that the support was not original; see section 1.2, above.

that might not survive otherwise. Paintings on both canvas and panel supports were transferred, but the new support chosen was almost always a canvas, which was felt to be a more stable support than wood as it would not warp and was not susceptible to insect damage.

Very few examples are known of paintings being transferred from canvas to panel.[14] This appears to have been an extremely unusual choice, and the poplar to which the *Virgin and Child*'s paint layers were transferred may have been selected for aesthetic reasons rather than directly for reasons of preservation. One intriguing example of canvas-to-panel transfer was carried out in Vienna in 1853, on an Italian painting that was believed at the time to have been originally executed on panel.[15] The restorers working on the Vienna painting appear to have believed that they were dealing with a work that had already been transferred from panel to canvas, and so that to transfer it to panel would be to return it to a state closer to the original. While there is no evidence that the intervention to the Courtauld painting was carried out for this precise reason, in a commercial market setting it may have been believed that a wooden support would be more aesthetically appropriate – and perhaps more marketable – for the composition.

6. Conclusions
The identity of the painter(s) or workshop who produced the Courtauld painting remains obscure. What is clear is that the painting was produced within a context of artistic and material exchange between northern, southern and central Europe, and engages in a dialogue with past as well as contemporary modes of representation. The composition takes an earlier, Flemish-influence Italian design, then 'translates' the landscape and flower elements into a mode more recognisable from Northern European artists who were themselves based in Italy. The Courtauld painting's exact, if more expediently-produced, replication of the Louvre version's composition suggests it to be the product of a thriving and collaborative commercial workshop environment. The aesthetically-driven choice of a new poplar support during the 18th or 19th century gives an intriguing insight into past attitudes to the value of such cross-cultural pieces, and can be seen as an attempt to firmly 'Italianise' what may have been perceived as a culturally ambiguous object.

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[14] The history of transfers is known largely from the archives of museums. The practice of canvas-to-panel transfer may have been more common in private conservation studios where fewer records were kept.

[15] E. Oberthaler and M. Griesser, 'Titian's *Madonna with the Cherries* – a conservation history reconsidered,' in *Preprints of the 50th International IIC Congress*, Melbourne, 2000

1. Unknown, after Johann König(?), *Virgin and Child*. After treatment. Courtauld Gallery (CIA 1289)

2. After Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin and Child*, attributed to Johann König, early 17th century. Oil on poplar. 60 x 59 cm. Louvre, Paris

3. Leonardo da Vinci, *Madonna of the Carnation*. 1473-78. Oil on poplar. 62.3 x 48.5cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich

4. Matthäus Merian the Elder (1593-1650), *Landscape with Sunrise*, oil on copper, 18x14.6cm, Kunstmuseum Basel

5. Courtauld version: has been extended by up to 1.5cm along two vertical edges and cut down by an unknown amount on top and bottom edges

6. Louvre version: has been extended by 4.5cm along two vertical edges

7. Leonardo *Madonna of the Carnation*: has been cut down by 1.4 cm on left side and trimmed by a 0.5cm on top and bottom edges

8. During retouching, framed

9. Johann König, *Wooded river landscape with St John the Baptist*, oil on copper, c.1610. Private collection.

10. Attr. Johann König, *Latona changing the Lycian peasants into frogs*, oil on copper, 1610-1613. 18.5 x 25.4 Courtauld Gallery.

11. Verrocchio, *Study of a Female Head* British Museum

12. Workshop of Verrocchio (possibly Perugino), *Study of a Female Head*. British Museum

13. The Leonardo *Madonna of the Carnation* overlaid with the Louvre copy showing similarity of proportions, with minor variations in the size of the arched windows

14. The Louvre copy overlaid with the Courtauld copy

15. Jan van Eyck, *The Annunciation*, c.1434/1436. oil on canvas transferred from panel. 90 x 34 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

16. Hans Memling, *Flowers in a Jug*, c.1485. Oil on panel. 29 x 23cm. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid
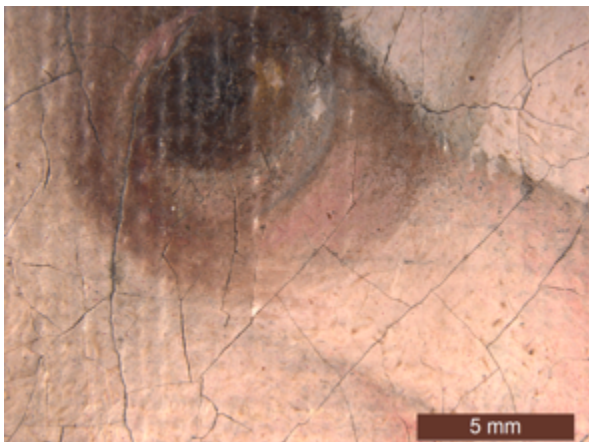

17. Ludger tom Ring the Younger, *Bouquet of flowers in a porcelain vase*. Private collection
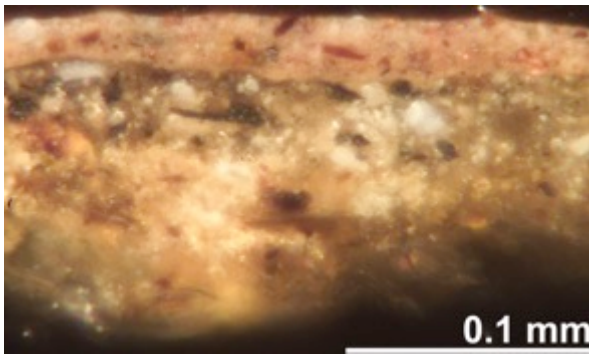
18. Cross section of paint sample, taken from small loss on Christ's chin.

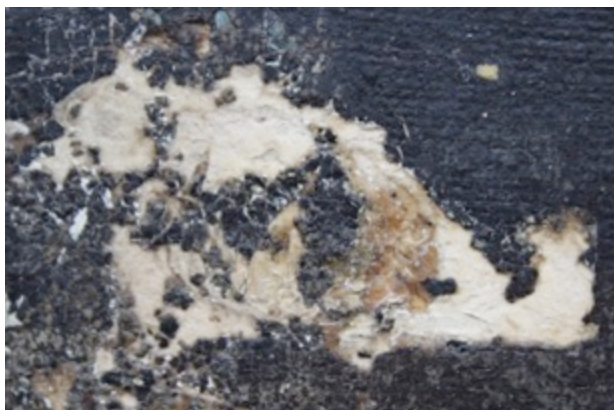19. Detail showing reserve left around edge of carnation

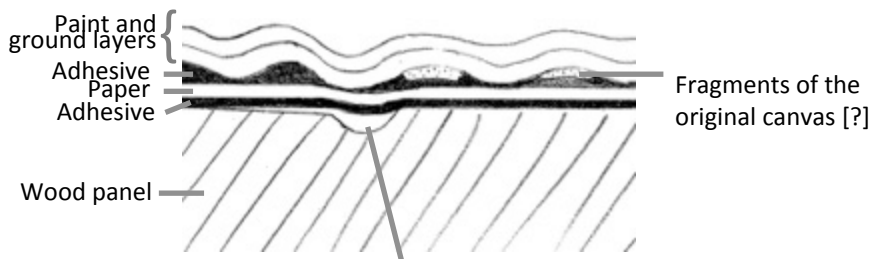20. Photomicrograph of Christ's eye, after cleaning.

21. Hendrik Goltzius, *Danaë*, 1603, Los Angeles Country Museum of Art

22. X-radiograph of Courtauld version.

23. Detail, taken during removal of fills, showing absence of canvas between painting and support. A paper interlayer has been applied between the paint film and the panel.

24. Diagram showing the structure of the painting and support